

What you should know about molds

Molds are small organisms found just about everywhere, on plants, foods and dry leaves. Mold spores are very tiny and lightweight particles that can travel easily through the air. Molds are beneficial to the environment and are needed to break down dead material. Certain types of mold have proven extremely valuable in the production of antibiotics. However, when molds are present in large numbers, they may cause allergic symptoms in some people similar to those caused by plant pollen.

The coastal air of Southern California typically contains 2000 mold spores in every cubic yard of air. Other parts of the country, especially agricultural regions, may contain 10,000 mold spores in a cubic yard. Literally trillions of spores have always existed in this area.

Why does mold grow?

Moisture allows mold to grow. The moisture comes from leaking pipes, potted plants, or recent flooding, humidifiers, or damp walls. Wet cellulose materials, including paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles, and wood products, are favorite mold foods. Dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation materials, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery support mold growth. Mold can grow in any building when moisture is present.

Can mold affect my health?

In general, we can be exposed to some mold every day, usually by touching, eating or breathing it. When mold is growing on a surface, spores may spread into the air where they can be easily inhaled. Some people who ingest or inhale a large number of spores may have health effects. Molds rarely infect healthy people. But naturally occurring mold in the outside air is associated with allergies in some adults and children, often producing symptoms like hay fever. Hay fever like reactions are common and include:

- Respiratory problems such as wheezing, difficulty breathing and shortness of breath, especially in individuals with chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma
- Nasal and sinus congestion
- Eye irritation (burning, watery, or reddened eyes)
- Dry cough
- Nose or throat irritation
- Skin rashes

In very rare and extreme cases, some people may report headaches, memory problems, mood swings, nosebleeds, body aches and pains, and fevers.

Some people are more sensitive to molds than others. These include:

- Infants and children
- Elderly persons
- Immune compromised patients (i.e., people with HIV infection, cancer, liver disease, etc., or who are under-going chemotherapy)
- Individuals with existing respiratory conditions, such as allergies and asthma.

Who should I call if I suspect a health problem caused by mold?

Call your physician for an appointment. If your doctor diagnoses a problem associated with mold, he may ask a Naval Hospital industrial hygienist to evaluate your home environment.

How do I tell if I have a mold problem?

Investigate, don't test. The most practical way to find a mold problem is by using your eyes to look for mold growth and by using your nose to locate the source of a suspicious odor. Mold often appears as discoloration, staining, or fuzzy growth on the surface of building materials or furnishings. If you see mold (cottony, velvety, granular, or leathery and have varied colors of white, gray, brown, black, yellow, green), or if there is an earthy or musty smell, you should assume a mold problem exists.



How can I prevent mold in my house?

For the most part, one should take routine measures to prevent mold growth in the home.

The most effective way to prevent mold contamination is to eliminate the source of water. Mold must have water to grow. Amplified mold growth is almost always associated with moisture, water leaks, or elevated humidity levels. Here is what you should do to prevent mold from growing in your quarters:

1. Fix or report the source of a water problem or leak.
2. Reduce indoor humidity levels by venting bathrooms, dryers, and other moisture-generating sources to the outside; using air conditioners and de-humidifiers; increasing cross-flow ventilation by opening windows and doors periodically; and using exhaust fans whenever cooking, dishwashing, and cleaning.
3. Don't install carpeting in areas like bathrooms, where moisture is always present.
4. Dry damp spots within 48 hours to prevent significant mold growth.
5. For cleaning small amounts of mold: Use rubber gloves, soap and water. Scrub the affected area until clean. Rinse with water. Disinfect the area with a solution of one part of laundry bleach to nine parts of water. Do not use ammonia cleaners. (CAUTION. Do not mix chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners, they produce a very irritating gas.) Let the treated area dry naturally overnight.

Don't clean large areas covered with mold, and don't clean mold at all if you are sensitive to it. Call your Housing Manager (phone number). Call Base Housing (phone number) if you have a question about the amount of mold it is safe to clean.

What else can I do?

Any one experiencing symptoms like hay fever should:

- Use allergen resistant covers for mattresses and pillows.
- Clean house with a HEPA-filtered vacuum cleaner. This will minimize allergens thrown into the air during cleaning.
- Periodically change the air filters for your air conditioner and indoor ventilation system.

Who should I call if I suspect a mold problem in my base house?

Call your Housing Manager (phone number) for housing problems. Call your physician, if you suspect health problems.

More Information on Mold:

Mold in My Home
www.cal-iaq.org/mold9803.htm

Mold in Residential Buildings
www.nahbro.org

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